

Reflections from the Journey

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As a high school student, I took Spanish for four years. At the end of my high school career, I was a 4.0 student in Mr. Havea's Spanish class. However, I couldn't read, speak, or write three sentences of Spanish. My high scores were due to overwhelming successes in our weekly class "bingo" sessions. Unfortunately, when I moved on to college, I had to start learning a new foreign language because I had not developed my skills after basically skipping through four years of Spanish instruction. Of course, I would be foolish to blame my instructors for my failure to learn Spanish, because I chose to refuse to learn the subject matter successfully. However, my experience with Spanish is a useful illustration, in this case, because over the past nine months I have been learning a new language—the discourse of intercultural rhetoric. Unlike my previous encounter with Spanish, I have treasured the subject materials that I have studied in this program. I am convinced that I will look back at this unique experience to see it as a training ground for both my professional and life-long goals.

Throughout the course of the year, I have written about various aspects of intercultural rhetoric. However, in this reflection I am focusing my attention on three specific papers. In each of these assignments, I looked at intercultural rhetoric from a different standpoint. In the first paper, I examined this topic in terms of what kinds of strategies for interpretation and negotiation people use when engaging in intercultural discursive practices. In the second paper, I considered what happens when an individual plans to communicate across boundaries. (In this case, the Bible was the text, but the tools that are used to communicate in this instance are generic to written communication.) Finally, in my third paper, I walked inside of Pentecostal preaching so that I could define this unique preaching style—this genre—from the standpoint of intercultural communication.

1. *Discovering the Making of Meaning, Reading Texts, and Negotiating Identity within an Intercultural Context.*

My own interest in intercultural communication stems from a lifetime of cultural code switching. As the daughter of a Pentecostal preacher, the eldest of eleven beautiful children, graduate of an elite women's college, and advocate for social justice (especially in regards to race in America), I have understood the necessity for intercultural communication. My academic background in politics, African-American studies, and intercultural rhetoric have also sparked a greater sense of appreciation for the challenges that individuals—especially people of color—face when they walk into a racially diverse setting. This paper seeks to briefly highlight several of the challenges that individuals face when negotiating their own identities and making meaning within an intercultural context.

2. *Establishing an Audience through Biblical Text*

Many Christians believe the Bible to be the holy, inspired, word of God. Over the summer, Barnes and Noble announced that the Bible was the best-selling book of all time. Few people realize that there are hundreds of translations and versions of the Bible. However, a Barnes and Noble web search can produce a list of over 200 different versions of Bibles. With so much competition in the marketplace, publishers and editors must find a way to compete in the marketplace and attract customers to their product. One response to this challenge has been to produce audience-specific Bibles. In this project, I selected three very different Bibles to determine how the texts were framed for different readers. The three Bibles were the *New International Version: Walk thru the Bible*, *Youthwalk Devotional Bible*, and *The Spirit-Filled Life Bible*. Ultimately, I found that the editors of these different Bibles designed and constructed their audiences through three key textual elements: the introduction, the format structure, and finally the language in the texts.

3. *Making the Case for Pentecostal Preaching as a Genre.*

The word *genre* has traditionally been used in literary study to distinguish different kinds of literary works, such as the epic, the lyric, and the dramatic. *Genre*, in this sense, is defined by Johnstone (in press) as a “recurrent verbal form associated with a recurrent purpose.” For example, business letters or scholarly abstracts are easily recognizable forms whose respective

rhetorical purposes and structures are widely acknowledged as familiar elements of specific genres.

The black church experience and Pentecostal preaching style are often linked together and are thought to be one and the same. These sacred events have become so familiar within certain parts of American cultures that the form and stylistic features have been successfully parodied in television shows, commercials, and several movies—such as *The Apostle* and *Leap of Faith*. Through a careful analysis of the history and texts of Pentecostal preaching, I discuss this preaching style as a genre born out of a series of recurrent occasions, register, and stylistic features. These features include Bible readings, intonation, repetition, and distinctive pronoun usage, each of which work together to create a unique and rhetorically rich genre.

Summary

Intercultural rhetoric—as both a conceptual tool and strategy—has already proven to be useful in my work with ministerial outreach programs at my church and the community of people with whom I worship. With the help of my pastor, I have developed several publications that are designed to introduce people to our church and invite them to fellowship with us. But more importantly, these materials may lead people toward spiritual growth. I have also helped create some audience-specific materials, such as the *Youth Times Newsletter*, that are being used to harness the rhetorical talent of various members of the congregation and give people a chance to express their essence in a public forum. These examples of community outreach are just modest indicators of the capacity that I have incorporated into my skill based through this Master's program.

When designing these materials, I was able to think about my audience in a whole new light. I understood how the significance of word choice and pronoun usage is central for engaging in intercultural inquiry. As I continue to reach out into the community through ministerial outreach and communications projects, I will be able to use my understanding of intercultural rhetoric on a much larger scale. Frankly, I am excited about all of the possibilities that exist because of the tools with which I have been equipped.

This fall, I will be enrolling in Syracuse College of Law to begin the long road toward becoming a lawyer. However, I feel that I have access to specific tools that my classmates will probably not have. With the skills acquired from classes such as argumentation, discourse analysis, writing in the public interests, and community literacy, I will be able to approach one of those jargon-filled, legal texts with more understanding and know-how. And with a law degree and a Master's in rhetoric (which once was traditionally a part of most law programs), I feel safe to say, "Look out world. . . here I come!"

Works Cited

Johnstone, Barbara (in press). "Prior texts and prior discourses," in *Discourse analysis: An introduction*. New York: Blackwell.